

## **1930 - Murphy Strikes Peelee Island**

*by Frank Start - VE3AJ*

Back in the early 30's (the 1930's to be exact) there was a radio telephone circuit between Peelee Island and the telephone office in Leamington. This was to provide emergency communications in case of the telephone cable (underwater) being damaged by ice. I was not aware of its existence until the spring of '31 or '32 when it started giving trouble. In those days for me, it was a case of "no trouble - no work" (And it was to continue for another 38 years.) I proceeded 'muy pronto' to Windsor to contact the D.O. T. representative there for further information. This was Roy Gooding, a good friend of mine I had run into on several occasions in the past when 'looking for trouble'. This time I found he was way ahead of me and had gone on to Leamington, also on the Peelee Island trouble.

Then it was Windsor to Leamington by taxi, only to find that Roy was already at the airfield. The airfield turned out to be just that, a farmer's field with one lonely aircraft in the middle. And it was no Aeroplane Deluxe, but an ancient open cockpit job of the training type (WW-1). At this time it was surrounded by mechanics with blow torches and tools plus numerous bags of mail. Roy said that they had been trying to get the engine started for three days and that it would take off as soon as they got it to do so. He didn't say anything about going with it, and after a second look at the aeroplane, I wasn't too keen on going myself.

Suddenly the engine started sputtering and banging and roared into life. So the pilot hurried over and said "climb into that thing and we will be off". At first I thought he was talking of the aircraft but then noticed he was pointed to a flying suit that had been laying on the ground beside the mail for the past three days. So I said to myself, "When you gotta go, you gotta go." The suit was about four sizes too big and when I started to move, I fell over the long pant legs, (or maybe they didn't want to go either). I climbed on board and with some difficulty moved the mail around to make sitting room but I was still too high. We were soon bumping along the field and finally became airborne.

We went up in a hurry and banked around at what seemed like 90 degrees. I had to find something to hold onto. I thought this must be flying the hard way. The flight did not last too long and we came down at the south end of the island on the lake ice. But the thrills were not yet over. An old car stood by and we transferred, (the mail and I) to the rear seat again. And now the fun began. The Ice was smooth and at first, the traction was poor but when we got started in the general direction of the north end of the island but never in a straight line for more than two seconds. Skidding from side to side and sometimes going stern first. It was hair raising while it lasted.

At the north end we got on to the roads but. they were just as bad as on the lake, everywhere there was ice. Finally we arrived at our destination and I was glad to climb out. The telephone office was on the second floor of a two storey frame house. The YL at the board turned out to be the wife of the car driver who was also the second operator.

I noticed that the switchboard was in operation and apparently OK. At first opportunity I looked

over the RT transmitter, a low power AM unity of the MOPA variety. It appeared to be in working order. I got the operator to contact Leamington and the conversation was quite normal in both directions, no breaking up or apparent signal

shift. Then I asked the second operator to sit down and operate in his usual manner. He sat down, wrapped his big paw around the shiny chrome handle of the mic and stuck his face into it. I thought he was going to swallow it. He called Leamington and right away we heard the Leamington operator, "Unable to read you... please repeat."

There was enough distortion, due to heavy over-modulation, for good communication. We had no scope to confirm this diagnosis. We repeated tests with the operator at Leamington with the same results. By this time we had received several phone calls from the pilot who was anxious to get back to Leamington. So with a few parting instructions to the second operator, we headed back.

On arrival I noticed three men looking at the wheels of the plane. One of the tires was flat. The pump to remedy the trouble was also flat. So the situation was easily taken care of by letting out the air in the good tire. We would now be on an even keel providing we got off the ground. The take-off was rough but we made it. Landing back on the mainland was nearly disastrous as we landed on a ploughed field. That was my last flight with that pilot. Some time later, I learned that he made one flight too many with fatal results to both himself and his aeroplane.

Not long after that episode I made a trip to Chicago on the M. V. Chicago Tribune with a load of paper. This time I made the return flight via American Airlines, first class all the way, no more open cockpit seats with the mail.